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Iron in Your Diet

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Iron in Your Diet

Do You Know

- What iron is?
- Why you need iron?
- Who needs iron the most?

Iron is a very important nutrient used by all living cells in the body. Iron is needed for building muscles and blood. It also has an important job to do in the bloodstream. It carries oxygen to all the cells in the body so that they can do their work.

Without enough iron, a person may feel tired and worn-out. Everyone needs iron, but some need more than others. Babies, children and teenagers are growing quickly. As they grow, their bodies are rapidly making red blood cells. Also, women of child-bearing age need to replace iron lost every month through menstruation. Pregnant women need a high level of iron for their body and their baby's.

Would You Like

- To know how much iron you need?
- For your family to eat healthy?
- To learn what foods have iron?

Recommended Dietary Allowances

Use Table 1 below to find out how much iron each member of your family should have. Healthy full-term infants are born with a supply of iron that lasts four to six months.

Try to eat foods rich in iron each day. MyPyramid can help you plan your family's meals to include foods which have good iron content. Table 2 on the next page lists a few of the best sources of iron from different food groups.

Table 1. Recommended daily dietary allowances for iron (mg).

Age	Males	Females	Pregnant females	Lactating females
7 to 12 months	11	11	N/A	N/A
1 to 3 years	7	7	N/A	N/A
4 to 8 years	10	10	N/A	N/A
9 to 13 years	8	8	N/A	N/A
14 to 18 years	11	15	27	10
19 to 50 years	8	18	27	9
51+ years	8	8	N/A	N/A

Source: Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences

Table 2. Good sources of iron.

Food	Iron (mg)
Liver, pork, 3 ounces	20
Liver, chicken, 3 ounces	9
Liver, beef, 3 ounces	8
Dried beans, 1 cup cooked	5
Chili with beans, 1 cup	4
Lean pork or beef, 3 ounces	3
Chicken, 3 ounces	1.5
Fish, 3 ounces	1
Egg, 1 whole	1
Ready-to-eat cereal, 100% iron fortified, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup	18
Oatmeal, fortified, 1 cup cooked	10
Cream of Wheat® $\frac{3}{4}$ cup cooked	8
Rice, enriched, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cooked	1
Whole wheat bread, 1 slice	1
White bread, enriched, 1 slice	1
Pasta, enriched, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cooked	1
Spinach, boiled, drained, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup	2
Lima beans, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cooked	1.5
Green peas, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cooked	1.5
Greens, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cooked	1
Tomato juice, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup	1
Mixed vegetables, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cooked	1
Watermelon, 6" X 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ " slice	3
Raisins, 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ ounce (small box)	1.5
Prunes, 4 large	1.5

Compare the values for iron content in Table 2 with the amount of iron you need daily. Are you getting your recommended dietary allowance of iron every day?

YES / NO

Could you

- Learn new recipes high in iron?
- Learn about foods rich in iron to include in your family's diet?
- Use iron-fortified foods in your family's meal?

There are many products that have the words "fortified" and "enriched" on their labels. Such foods are enriched bread, rice, cornmeal and fortified cereals. Iron enriched or iron fortified products are especially important for babies and young children. Doctors recommend that babies who aren't breast-fed receive iron fortified formula.

Eating certain foods together helps the body make better use of their nutrients. Vitamin C helps the body to use iron. Foods high in vitamin C include:

- Oranges
- Tomatoes
- Melons
- Broccoli
- Grapefruit
- Green pepper
- Greens
- Strawberries

References

Nutrition for Living, 4th edition, Christian and Greger

A Guide to Good Nutrition (EFNEP-1998)

Quick and Healthy, Volume II

National Institutes of Health, <http://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/iron.asp>

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